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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 005458

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SUBJECT: JAPAN AND VIETNAM AIM FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer per 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Vietnam President Nguyen Minh Triet's November 25-29 state visit to Japan was aimed at developing the two countries' "strategic partnership," with a strong focus on assisting infrastructure development, improving Vietnam's investment environment, raising bilateral trade and expanding political and diplomatic cooperation. In particular, with an eye to Vietnam's 2008 tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, PM Fukuda sought and won President Triet's support for Japan's permanent UNSC membership and for North Korean denuclearization. However, Triet demurred on the issue of Burma, saying he does not support sanctions against the Burmese regime. End Summary.

Seeking a "Strategic Partnership"

¶2. (C) Vietnamese President Nguyen Minh Triet visited Japan November 25-29 for the first-ever state visit by a Vietnamese leader. He was joined by Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai, Minister of Industry Vu Huy Hoang, Investment and Economic Planning Minister Vo Hong Phuc, Science and Technology Minister Hoang Van Phong and 130 business people. In addition to meetings with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, Triet also participated in a welcome ceremony and state banquet with Emperor Akihito. Meeting for approximately one hour on November 27, PM Fukuda described Japan-Vietnam relations as the best they have ever been, but nonetheless called for relations to improve even further by becoming "strategic partners," MOFA Southeast Asia Division I Deputy Director Atsushi Kuwabara told Embassy Tokyo. Both sides agreed to arrange the visits to Japan next year of National Assembly Chairman Nguyen Phu Trong and Communist Party General Secretary Nong Duc Manh. PM Fukuda also pledged to visit Vietnam at an "appropriately early time."

¶3. (C) Kuwabara noted that the visit's trade mission inked contracts for some 25 projects worth USD 4.5 billion, and PM Fukuda called for the two sides to initiate Phase 3 of the Japan-Vietnam Joint Initiative, which seeks to improve the investment climate in Vietnam for Japanese and other enterprises. President Triet described Japan as "Vietnam's

greatest economic partner," and agreed with PM Fukuda that the two countries should "soon" reach an Economic Partnership Agreement.

14. (C) PM Fukuda offered his condolences for the recent Can Tho bridge construction accident (in which a bridge being constructed by Japanese companies with Japanese ODA collapsed, killing 52 Vietnamese workers), pledging to get to the bottom of the accident and to take steps to prevent its recurrence. The PM also raised Japan's commitment to expand aid to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and to support Vietnam's North-South High-speed Rail Project, North-South Highway Project and Hoa Lac High Tech Park (pledges the PM also made to Vietnam PM Nguyen Tan Dung in Singapore (reftel)). Triet stressed that the Can Tho accident should not negatively affect bilateral relations, and that the bridge, once completed, should be a symbol of cooperative ties.

UN, North Korea and Burma

15. (C) Looking ahead to Vietnam's nonpermanent membership on the UN Security Council next year, PM Fukuda called on greater Japan-Vietnam cooperation at the UN and regarding issues such as North Korea, Burma, climate change and the environment, and energy security. President Triet expressed his support for Vietnam's permanent UNSC membership, as well as North Korea's denuclearization and Japan's "concerns" in this area. Triet also expressed concern about the situation in Burma, but said that he does not support economic sanctions. Triet also expressed his hope for greater cooperation in combating terrorism and transnational crime, Kuwabara reported.

"Japan's future in Southeast Asia"

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16. (C) Representative Masaaki Taira, Diet Member and Deputy Secretary General of the Japan-Vietnam Friendship League,

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said that Triet's visit took place in a "festive atmosphere."

"There are few countries that Japan is more interested in than Vietnam," Taira said. Most Japanese are very well disposed to Vietnam for historical and cultural reasons, and the Vietnamese have warmly welcomed Japanese trade, aid and assistance. Although Taira is a self-acknowledged "China person," he sees Vietnam as "Japan's future in Southeast Asia" and hopes that grassroots and other ties can be expanded.

"Strong Vietnamese Support for Japan's Diplomacy"

17. (C) Waseda University Professor of Economics Tran Van Tho, one of the few Vietnamese nationals with full tenure at a major Japanese university, observed that Triet's visit should be seen in the context of Vietnam's attempt to strike a balance between and among the United States, the EU, China and Japan with its high-level visit diplomacy. Particularly striking about Japan-Vietnam relationship, Tran continued, is the extent to which Vietnam is willing to support Japan's diplomatic initiatives around the world, from UN Security Council reform to other, more minor projects. "Perhaps no other country is as willing as Vietnam is to speak up for and support Japan," Tho opined.

SCHIEFFER